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ABSTRACT

Twelve publications in the ERIC system were reexamined and more detailed annotations written for this booklet. The approaches to vandalism prevention cited range from a U.S. Senate committee attempting to measure the cost of school vandalism nationwide to measures taken by individual school systems. (MLF)

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The Best of ERIC presents annotations of ERIC literature on important topics in educational management.

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Vandalism Prevention

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Baughman, Paul, and others. ***Vandalism and Its Prevention.*** Los Angeles: School Building Committee, Southern Section, California Association of School Business Officials, 1971. 29 pages. ED 091 829.

Baughman and his colleagues give an overview of the school vandalism problem and some approaches to solving it. Until vandalism is redefined to encompass all forms of property destruction, deliberate or not, its true cost will remain unknown. Vandalism can, however, be analyzed statistically. It is a problem that affects all areas, but it is most serious in large, urban school districts.

Vandalism is most likely to occur in the late afternoon and evening hours and on weekends; it is far more prevalent in the spring than in the fall. Despite some assertions to the contrary, "the findings about the socio-economic status of vandals are rather mixed." Any school may be vandalized, but often "it is the school which is delinquent when there is considerable vandalism."

The document suggests some ways to control losses from arson, "the most common form of vandalism which results in very costly damage." Several factors may influence a building's vulnerability to fire—its "damageability." Some types of building materials are more readily combustible than others, but the structure of a building is often as important as the nature of the materials from which it has been constructed. The strength of its floor and roof supports and assemblies is often a critical factor in damageability. In addition, large open areas and unprotected vertical openings may facilitate the rapid spread of fires.

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Bayh, Birch. ***Our Nation's Schools—A Report Card: "A" in School Violence and Vandalism. Preliminary Report of the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, Based on Investigations, 1971-1975.*** Washington, D.C.: Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Congress of the U.S., 1975. 40 pages. ED 104 006.

Evidence gathered by Senator Bayh's subcommittee portrays an alarming picture of current school security problems. While the report rightly emphasizes the epidemic of violence that is plaguing America's schools, it also discusses school vandalism. The current yearly cost of vandalism, theft, and arson has been conservatively estimated at over half a billion dollars, a sum that "represents over $10 per year for every school student, and . . . equals the total amount expended on textbooks throughout the country in 1972." Vandalism costs the average district about $60,000 a year, but about "60 percent of all vandalism" takes place in "large urban districts of over 25,000 students." For those districts, the yearly toll averages $135,000.

The report also discusses the situations in individual districts. According to estimates, in 1971 New York City spent $1.25 million replacing nearly a quarter of a million broken windowpanes. In Boston, five schools had their alarm systems stolen. In Wichita, Kansas, vandalism costs rose from over $18,000 in 1963 to more than $112,000 in 1973. The situation shows few signs of getting better, and there is evidence that specific developments may make it worse. For example, "violence and vandalism in the schools of Boston, Mass. increased dramatically when school officials began busing." Vandalism and, particularly, violence have become so serious that "our school system is facing a crisis of serious dimensions, the solutions to which must be found if the system is to survive in a meaningful form."

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Coursen, David. ***Vandalism Prevention. NAESP School Leadership Digest Second Series, Number One. ERIC/CEM Research Analysis Series, Number Sixteen.*** Washington, D.C.: and Eugene, Oregon: National Association of Elementary School Principals; and ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, 1975. 26 pages. ED 111 051.

Coursen synthesizes existing material on the subject of vandalism prevention. The author proceeds from a discussion of the characteristics and motivations of vandals to a brief inventory of some of the types of equipment that may be used to reduce or control vandalism. For example, lighting school grounds at night may deter vandals who would otherwise feel

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protected by "the cover of darkness." But, if it is relatively easy to install equipment that ***should*** work, developing a comprehensive vandalism prevention program that actually ***does*** work is a far more formidable challenge. One part of any such program should be an effort to design school facilities that are well suited to stand up under the actual conditions of their use.

Vandalism is extremely expensive, but its real costs often reach well beyond the price of replacing the specific piece of property destroyed. "Money spent replacing things is basically money diverted from other, more constructive uses, money that might otherwise be spent actively improving a school rather than merely attempting to restore it." The hidden costs of vandalism mushroom still further when property destruction disrupts the educational system and begins to "demoralize everyone connected with a school." Still another problem is the overzealousness with which some school officials attempt to solve the vandalism problem. A school might indeed be made vandal-proof by the installation of "high walls, roving searchlights, armed guards, vicious dogs, and checkpoints at every entrance," but quality education could hardly flourish or even survive in such an environment.

Order copies from National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1801 North Moore Street, Arlington, Virginia 22209. $1.50. Payment must accompany order. Order MF from EDRS. $0.83. Specify ED number.

Edwards, L. F. "School Property Losses Reach Record Heights. Insurance Costs: Up and Almost Away." ***Nation's Schools,*** 85, 2 (February 1970), pp. 51-55, 111-112. EJ 015 049.

Despite its age, this remains one of the most useful surveys of the problems schools have encountered in obtaining insurance. Edwards notes that traditionally "the insurance industry considered education institutions prime prospects and vigorously solicited schools for their entire insurance program." Partially because of the rise in school vandalism, this is no longer the case. In demonstration, the author lists a number of school districts that faced increases of from 50 to 300 percent in their insurance rates. The situation was even worse for New Brunswick, New Jersey, where "no company was interested in offering [insurance] at the rates approved by the N.J. insurance commissioner." As a result, "the schools had to close down until insurance was available."

Despite the existence of a few alternatives, "most districts still rely on commercial insurance." Recently, there have been increased demands for state insurance programs, and some states have implemented successful programs. But over the years, a number of states and cities "have experimented with property insurance ***funds*** and most have failed—some with dramatic consequences." Some large school districts have tried self-insurance programs, but this requires careful planning. Whatever approach a district uses, it must obtain "proper and complete coverage. The most expensive lesson a buyer can experience is an uninsured loss."

Ellison, Willie S. "School Vandalism: 100 Million Dollar Challenge." ***Community Education Journal,*** 3, 1 (January 1973), pp. 27-33. EJ 069 285.

Despite the serious underestimate of vandalism costs in its title, this article makes a number of useful observations about the subject. One central fact about school vandalism is the absence of useful, systematically acquired information about the subject. Indeed, vandalism itself is "a much discussed offense that is legally non-existent." Thus, an essential step in prevention is collecting precise information about vandalism into a data-base system from which strategies appropriate to particular types of school situations can be developed.

The absence of such information, combined with a superficial application of "common sense," has fostered the adoption of the maximum security approach currently in fashion. Ellison suggests that security measures often "have been recommended primarily by school business officials and insurance companies," without any real evidence that they are likely to work. Indeed, the very fact that vandalism losses continue to increase suggests that a strategy of doing "more of what has been done in the past" is unlikely to succeed. Placing more hardware in a school, far from protecting it, actually "may serve to bring it under further attack."

Fortunately, some facts are known about vandals themselves. Most vandals are males between the ages of 11 and 16 operating in groups. There is some correlation between the atmosphere of a school and the extent of its vandalism problem. Where students, staff, and community have a high level of identification with the life of the school, there is usually less vandalism. As a result, it is crucial "to get people involved in the school and its program."

Goldmeier, Harold. "Vandalism: The Effects of Unmanageable Confrontations." ***Adolescence,*** 9, 33 (Spring 1974), pp. 49-56. EJ 097 216.

This article provides a number of useful insights into the general nature of all types of vandalism. Goldmeier notes that most vandals are white males in their early teens. Acts of vandalism are wanton, predatory, or vindictive. In wanton vandalism, property is "destroyed purely for excitement, usually without an ulterior motive." Predatory vandalism is done for gain, while vindictive vandalism is in response to some real or imagined wrong done to the vandal.

The police and law courts seldom treat acts of vandalism as serious offenses. For example, during one six-month period in Detroit there were 8,000 vandalism complaints, 860 arrests, and only 200 prosecutions. Arrested vandals "are rarely charged with criminal damage to property." In fact, Goldmeier cites one source that claims that "58% of all vandalism arrests result

in the juvenile being referred to their parents or some community social adjustment agency." These facts surely support the author's claim that there is a widespread "attitude that accepts vandalism as an unexceptional part of life."

Greenberg, Bernard. ***School Vandalism: A National Dilemma. Final Report.*** Menlo Park, California: Stanford Research Institute, 1969. 43 pages. ED 035 231.

This seven-year-old report on vandalism remains one of the most insightful statements available on the subject. The author argues that vandalism should be defined comprehensively as "acts that result in significant damage to schools." Evidence suggests that fires account for 50 percent of the total of vandalism losses, property damage 30 percent, and theft 20 percent.

There are two basic types of antivandalism efforts. Most schools rely on deterrence, on finding security approaches that will protect them from vandals. Unfortunately, deterrence programs are usually developed haphazardly, with little consideration of the relationship between the cost of the security measures and the amount of losses they may prevent. In any case, Greenberg suggests that "a maximum security approach to controlling vandalism has proven ineffective over time."

The alternative to deterrence is prevention, attempting to determine what problems cause a school to be vandalized and how to solve those problems. Vandalism is often most serious among students who are bored with education and indifferent to their schools. One district developed an effective prevention program by identifying potential vandals and enlisting them in the antivandalism effort. The author concludes that prevention "may, in the longer range, be the most cost-effective solution" to school vandalism.

The greatest handicap to the development of effective programs of deterrence or prevention is the lack of useful information about vandalism. Research has uncovered "no one set of anti-vandalism techniques that could be universally applied to school districts." As a result, a school must "determine the nature and causes of vandalism first and then apply ***appropriate*** deterrent or preventive techniques." Unfortunately, there are few guidelines for schools that attempt to do this, since "the literature describing the measures various schools have undertaken is seriously deficient in describing the environment or the conditions that have caused certain measures to succeed or fail."

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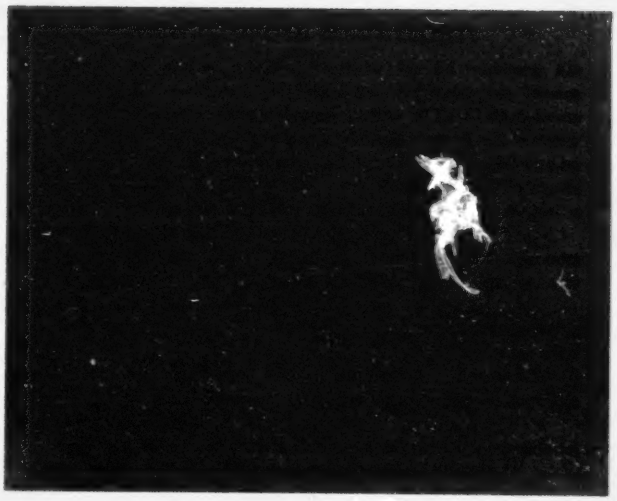
Haney, Stan. "School District Reduces Vandalism 65 Percent." ***American School and University,*** 46, 4 (December 1973), p. 29. EJ 087 785.

One common theme in the literature on vandalism is that a truly effective prevention program must enlist the active support of a school's students in the antivandalism effort. Unfortunately, specific suggestions about how this might actually be accomplished are in rather short supply. Thus this article, written by the director of buildings, grounds, and engineering, South San Francisco Unified School District, and describing the successful implementation of such a program, is particularly useful.

The program itself is actually quite simple. One dollar for each student at a school is placed in a fund that can be used to finance student projects if it is not needed to cover the cost of



vandalism at the school. As a result, students get both a tangible sense of vandalism's actual costs and a strong interest in reducing those costs. "Twenty broken windows may not be too meaningful. The cost of those windows subtracted from the proposed project becomes very meaningful." As a result, the primary impulse to control vandalism comes from the desires of the students themselves, rather than from any authoritarian security measures.

In its first semester of operation, the program helped reduce vandalism costs by 65 percent. The district has not, however, abandoned all other approaches. "Alarm systems and other standard security precautions are still in use throughout the school system, and they remain a valuable part of the overall program."

Juillerat, Ernest E., Jr. "Fires and Vandals: How to Make Them Both Unwelcome in Your Schools." ***The American School Board Journal,*** 159, 7 (January 1972), pp. 23-26. EJ 049 807.

School fire losses are a particularly critical aspect of the overall vandalism problem. Juillerat notes that "most school fires are ***set.*** They are not accidents." Currently, "schools are easy marks for a touch-off by a frustrated youth who is having problems at home or at school." One student set a series of fires causing nearly $1.5 million in damages in an effort to destroy records of his failing grades. Another set a $550,000 fire in protest against a forced haircut. This kind of wild imbalance between motivation and result is characteristic of school arson, since, as the author suggests, "these are ordinary examples."

The best security against major arson losses is an automatic fire detection and extinguishment system. The author notes that in one ten-year period, "no fire in a school fully protected by an automatic sprinkler system" became so serious that more than "three sprinkler heads" were needed to control it. The chances of serious fire damages can be greatly reduced by "securing buildings against breaking and entering and by providing automatic sprinkler systems." Other useful ways of reducing the risk of serious fire losses include enclosing stairways, installing fire doors and adequate room exits, using fire-retarding wall finishes, storing combustible waste, and conducting periodic fire drills.

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"Live-in 'School Sitters' Are Saving This District Thousands of Dollars Each Year—and Cutting Vandalism As Well." *The American School Board Journal*, 161, 7 (July 1974), pp. 36-39. EJ 100 926.

This article describes an antivandalism program called Vandal Watch developed in Elk Grove, California. In Vandal Watch, "families live in mobile homes adjacent to school buildings." They "receive no special training, they don't wear uniforms, and they aren't asked to patrol grounds regularly," since the mere presence of full-time residents on school grounds will be sufficient to discourage most vandals. Participating families must own their own mobile homes, but the school provides the sites rent-free and even pays for utilities.

Thus far, Vandal Watch has helped the school district "cut vandalism impressively" and even obtain insurance rate reductions. The cost of preparing a site is about $3,000, and utility costs are almost negligible, so school officials estimate that the savings from reduced vandalism will pay for the system within three years.

Miller, Lavon E., and **Beer, David.** "Security System Pays Off." *American School and University*, 46, 8 (April 1974), pp. 39-40. EJ 094 661.

Miller and Beer discuss the security system in use in the Fort Wayne, Indiana, school system. Each building is equipped with preamps to detect and transmit noises, magnetic door switches that cause a light to go on when a door is opened, devices that signal changes in temperature, and smoke detectors. The alarms are transmitted, via leased phone lines, to a central station monitored by a security force. "Once an alarm is received the security firm calls pre-designated persons to alert them to the problem."

The system was developed after a lengthy trial period in which the results of various security approaches were compared. Officials concluded, for example, that a central monitoring system would work most effectively. The system was then installed in several "problem schools in the district," and vandalism losses dropped so dramatically that the decision was made to install it in every school.

This type of security system is relatively inexpensive. In addition to the reduction in vandalism losses, the system has also helped reduce security and maintenance costs, and the district may also be able to save on its fire insurance rates.

Weeks, Susan. "Security against Vandalism. It Takes Facts, Feelings and Facilities." *American School and University*, 48, 7 (March 1976), pp. 37-46. EJ 134 489.

This article describes the conclusions of a conference held to explore several aspects of school vandalism. While there is no doubt that vandalism is a serious problem, there does seem to be a tendency to exaggerate its importance. As one participant noted, "Vandalism is not the number one problem everywhere. . . . Many schools have little or no vandalism." Before vandalism can really be understood or measured, schools must begin to keep reliable, uniform records of property destruction they suffer.

Many of the causes of vandalism are far beyond the reach of the schools themselves, but "there are four basic influences with which schools can deal directly." School size seems closely related to vandalism frequency; the evidence suggests that smaller schools are less likely to be vandalized. Larger schools might try to "profit from the effect of size by creating the semblance of smallness." It also appears that "unvandalized schools usually have strong leaders." A third, rather more obvious fact, is that some security precautions are essential for any school. And finally, the way schools treat their students is also related to the extent of vandalism they suffer. By using these facts, it may be possible for schools to reduce vandalism, but "there is a very definite, if painful agreement on the fact that no one will ever totally solve the problem."

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